

News From
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CHAFEE RELEASES STATEMENT ON GREENWICH BAY FISH KILL REPORT

WASHINGTON, DC – Narragansett Bay is our most precious natural resource, and all Rhode Islanders are entrusted as stewards of its shores and open waters. While we have made good progress in improving the Bay's health, the fish kill in Greenwich Bay provided a shocking reminder that human activities continue to threaten this unique ecosystem. It is clear that we have a lot of work to do.

I commend Governor Carcieri for his forceful, timely reaction to these deeply disturbing events. Likewise, I congratulate Jan Reitsma and his staff on writing a thoughtful, lucid report on the causes of the fish kill, and its implications for Narragansett Bay as a whole. It is more than just a report -- it is an action plan.

As a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, I will continue to do everything I can to identify federal resources to assist the State in carrying out DEM's recommendations. Toward that end, I have approached members of the Senate Appropriations Committee to ensure that the Bay Windows project is funded again next year. The fish kill showed us how crucial it is to have in place a monitoring system that provides reliable, real time data about the water quality of the Bay. It is thanks to the existing monitoring stations that DEM was able to determine with precision what happened in Greenwich Bay, and we should expand our efforts in that area.

While decisions on the viability of cesspools and the merits of mandatory sewer tie-ins will be made at the local and state levels, the federal government must play a role in helping to reduce the amount of nutrients entering the Greenwich Bay and Narragansett Bay watersheds. I am committed to making sure that the State continues to have the flexibility it needs to use all available federal and state funding resources -- such as Clean Water Act nonpoint source funds -- to move forward with storm water improvement projects. Similarly, the report's reference to nutrients traveling from the upper Narragansett Bay into Greenwich Bay underscores the urgency of completing the Narragansett Bay Commission's Combined Sewer Overflow project, and my colleagues and I in Congress are actively lobbying for additional federal funds.

Finally, I share Director Reitsma's assessment that we have undertaken sufficient planning for Narragansett Bay. According to the Partnership for Narragansett Bay, there have been approximately 200 plans for the future of the Bay. We have a good understanding of the connections between nutrient loading, the degradation of water quality, and the loss of critical wildlife habitat. This report provides a road map for preserving and enhancing the biodiversity and economic vitality of Narragansett Bay.

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